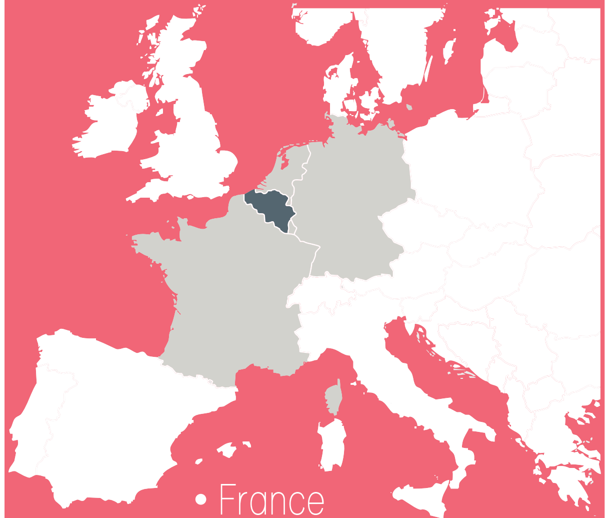
BELGIUM

at a glance

General information

NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES



- France
- Germany
- The Netherlands
- Luxembourg

CAPITAL

Brussels

POPULATION

11.099.554 inhabitants

POPULATION DENSITY

363 inhab./km²

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

- Dutch
- French
- German

SURFACE AREA

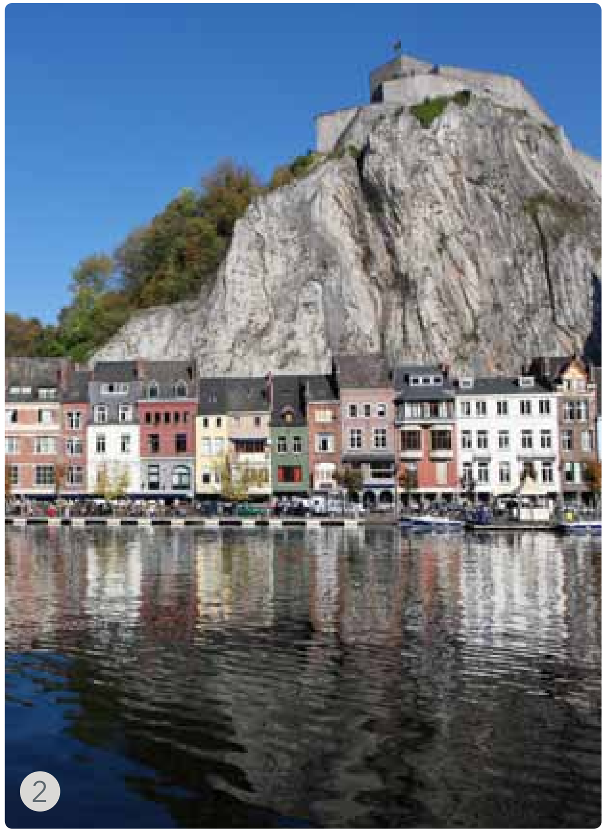
30.528 km²

CURRENCY



Euro













1. St. Peter's Church, Leuven
2. Citadel of Dinant
3. Bruges
4. Belfry, Tournai
5. Bouillon
6. Rue des Bouchers, Brussels

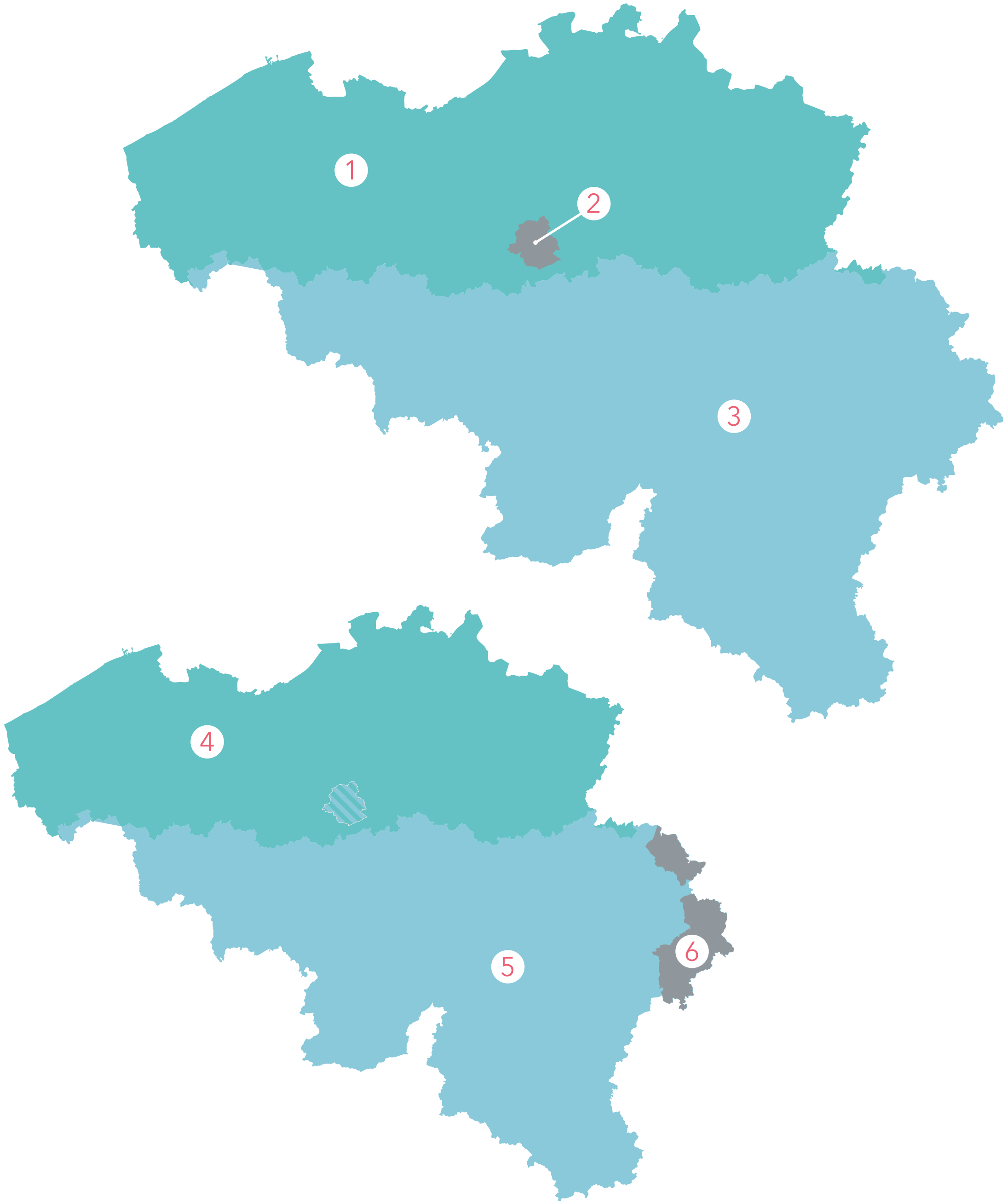
Belgium -
a country of regions

Belgium is a federal state made up of three Communities (the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community) and three regions (the Brussels-Capital Region, the Flemish Region and the Walloon Region).

The main federal institutions are the federal government and the federal parliament, and the Communities and Regions also have their own legislative and executive bodies.

The principal powers of the three Communities in Belgium, which are delimited on linguistic grounds, relate to education, culture, youth support and certain aspects of health policy.

The three Regions have powers for 'territorial issues', such as public works, agriculture, employment, town and country planning and the environment.



1. Flemish Region
2. Brussels-Capital Region
3. Walloon Region
4. Flemish Community
5. French Community
6. German-speaking Community

The Belgian monarchy

Belgium is a constitutional monarchy.

King Philippe, the current monarch, is the seventh King of the Belgians. In the political sphere the King does not wield power of his own but acts in consultation with government ministers. In performing his duties, the King comes into contact with many representatives of Belgian society.

The King and Queen and the other members of the Royal Family also represent Belgium abroad (state visits, economic missions and international meetings), while at home fostering close relations with their citizens and promoting public and private initiatives that make a contribution to improving society.



The King and Queen of Belgium

Leisure in Belgium

Flanders boasts many cities and ports and a fairly flat landscape, while Wallonia is more hilly, especially in the south with the Ardennes, whose natural beauty is enjoyed by tourists from far and wide. Belgium offers an incredibly wide range of leisure pursuits, including Ardennes forest walking trails and footpaths across the Plateau des Fagnes fenland, the joys of the North Sea coast, cycling, horse-riding and boating, golf courses, theme parks, castles and estates, international trade shows and exhibitions, antiques fairs and flea markets. Belgium also hosts a huge number of music festivals catering for all tastes, such as Tomorrowland, Rock Werchter, Couleur Café and Dour. There is something for everyone – and it's never very far away!











1. The Kite Festival, Ostend
2. The Belgian Ardennes
3. Jehay Castle
4. Tomorrowland

Heritage

Belgium is home to an incredible wealth of architectural masterpieces that bear witness to the leading styles adopted by architects down the centuries. During the Middle Ages, cathedrals and belfries sprang up that can still be admired today in the Belgian 'art cities', while countless castles are to be found dotted across the country. In the 20th century, Brussels became the centre of the Art Nouveau movement.

Awe-inspiring religious monuments have been carefully preserved and are open to the public, allowing visitors to enjoy the peaceful atmosphere of Belgium's beguinages or sample a Trappist beer and cheese produced by monks in one of the country's abbeys.

Belgium has also safeguarded the heritage of the wars of yesteryear, in the form of memorials, historical sites, cemeteries and re-enactments of key events.

Most of Belgium's cities are very old, with some of them even dating back over 2,000 years



Antwerp's Grote Markt (Market Square)

Diversity and multiculturalism

Belgium has always welcomed migrants from abroad, with people of many different nationalities making the country their home over the years, among them famous figures and intellectuals including Karl Marx, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Charles Baudelaire and Auguste Rodin, to name but a few.

Its central location in Europe at the crossroads between the Latin and Germanic worlds, its multilingualism and its pioneering political, social and religious freedoms have all contributed to giving Belgium its cosmopolitan character and made it into the tolerant multicultural society it is today.





The Zinneke Parade
these festivities in Brussels bring together associations, schools and neighbourhoods to work on a common project.

A country of legends... with adrenaline aplenty

Cycling is one of the country's favourite participation sports, and its popularity is further demonstrated by the major classic races that are held in Belgium, such as Liège-Bastogne-Liège, Ghent-Wevelgem, the Tour of Flanders and La Flèche Wallonne.

Another very popular sport, of course, is football. Many of the members of the Belgian men's national team (known as 'the Red Devils'), such as Romelu Lukaku, Marouane Fellaini, Vincent Kompany, Eden Hazard and Kevin De Bruyne, play for top clubs abroad.

Belgium is also at the top table when it comes to a wide range of other disciplines, for example tennis, hockey and judo, and international competitions. The Memorial Van Damme, for instance, is regarded as one of the world's premier athletics meetings.

Last but not least, Belgium is well known to fans of Formula 1 for its Grand Prix at Spa-Francorchamps, generally considered to be the most attractive Formula 1 racetrack in the world.







1. The Tour of Flanders
2. The Red Devils
3. The Spa-Francorchamps Circuit

Belgium -
a country brimming with creative talent

Cinema
What is special about Belgian film-making is the way it portrays a panorama of society and images of humanity with striking realism, telling stories of real lives and real people. A new generation of film-makers and actors and actresses gain frequent recognition for their achievements, with some picking up awards in Cannes (the Palmes d'Or) and Hollywood (the Oscars). Brussels and Bruges are also highly sought-after shooting locations for leading film-makers.

Ninth Art
As the unrivalled home of the comic strip, Belgium has the world's highest concentration of writers of such strips, following in the foot-steps of Hergé (Tintin), Peyo (The Smurfs), Edgar P. Jacobs (Blake and Mortimer), Morris (Lucky Luke) and Bob De Moor (Barelli, Cori le Moussaillon), Willy Vandersteen (Willy and Wanda), to name but a few.

Painting
The magnificent works of the Old Flemish Masters, such as Peter Paul Rubens, Pieter Bruegel, Jan Van Eyck and Anthony Van Dyck, and those of more recent artists, like Paul Delvaux and René Magritte, are to be found today in museums and art galleries the world over.

Music scene
The international music scene is buzzing with names of talented Belgian artists, among them Stromae, Milow, Selah Sue and Hoover-phonic.









Jazz

Belgium is a land of jazz musicians and the native country of Adolphe Sax, the inventor of the instrument that bears his name, the saxophone.

Fashion

Backed up by a long tradition of expertise and a tried-and-tested combination of creativity and a certain willingness to take a bit of a risk, Belgian designers' creations have now become a regular feature on the top catwalks and at the most prestigious fashion shows.







Design

Whether drafting plans for furniture or decorative items, Belgian designers love breaking down boundaries by mixing styles and blurring traditional distinctions. The world automotive industry is just one of the sectors where designers from Belgium have carved out a reputation for themselves.

Literature

Hugo Claus, Georges Simenon (who created Commissaire Maigret) and Amélie Nothomb are just some of a long list of Belgian writers stretching from the 19th century down to the present day, with some Belgian novelists' works being translated into a wide range of languages.

Industrial innovation

Belgium supplied customers all over the world with steam locomotives, steam boats and other heavy industrial equipment. The dynamo, soda and Bakelite and many other practical items were all invented by Belgians or people of Belgian origin.

1. Grouchy Smurf from Peyo
2. Stromae
3. Pieter Bruegel
4. Aaron Eckhart during the filming of The Expatriate in Brussels
5. Transforming Rhombic Dodecahedron (Xavier De Clippeleir) at the Belgium is Design stand during Milan Design Week 2014
6. Dries Van Noten's spring/summer collection 2014
7. E-flat alto saxophone built by Adolphe Sax in 1863, Musical Instruments Museum, Brussels

Belgium -
a country of gourmet experiences

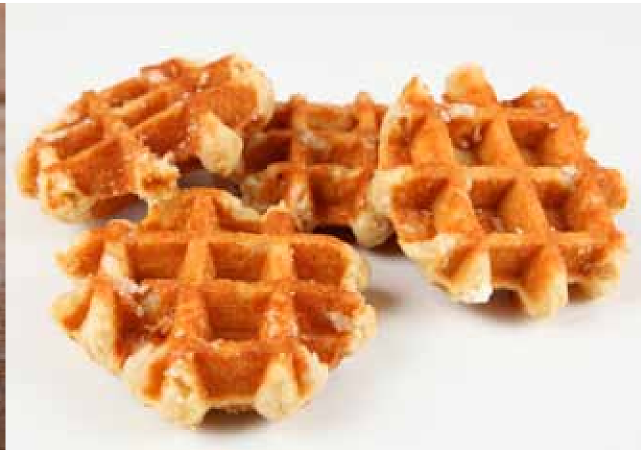
Belgium is a country with a myriad of breweries and different beers. Nowhere else in the world can you encounter so many local, authentic and colourful beers with such an enormous range of tastes and flavours. Indeed, while there are only 10 Trappist beers in the world, 6 of them are to be found in Belgium, being brewed by the monks in abbeys.

Another Belgian speciality is chocolate, which has built up a global name for itself with its unbeatable quality and taste. Alongside this, there are two more sweet treats that are inextricably linked with Belgium: waffles and speculoos.

Furthermore, for Belgians French fries (known as chips in the UK), sold at the country's many chip shops (friteries/frituren), are a national institution and how to cook them is kept a closely-guarded secret.

Belgians have also been a pioneer when it comes to making cheese. With over 300 varieties, Belgium is proud of its reputation as a cheese-making country.

Belgium is the country with the most restaurants that have been awarded stars per km² in the world



Folklore

Reflecting Belgians' love for food and drink and the good life, all manner of popular celebrations take place across the country throughout the year, including carnivals, religious processions and commemorative parades, as well as historical pageants. Every town and village keep their local traditions alive by organising their own festivities. With families and organisations spending months preparing for these events, these are true celebrations of the people for the people.

Belgium's folklore and its respected and revered traditions have been religiously passed down from generation to generation, and in many cases (for instance, Aalst Carnival, the Gille figures at the Carnival of Binche, the processional giants, animals and dragons in Ath, Brussels, Dendermonde, Mechelen and Mons but also the Meyboom in Brussels, and the Holy Blood Procession in Bruges) have even been recognised by UNESCO as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Belgium has as many festivals as it does towns and villages!







1. Aalst Carnival
2. Rose Monday in Eupen
3. The Ducasse Festival in Ath

Scientific research

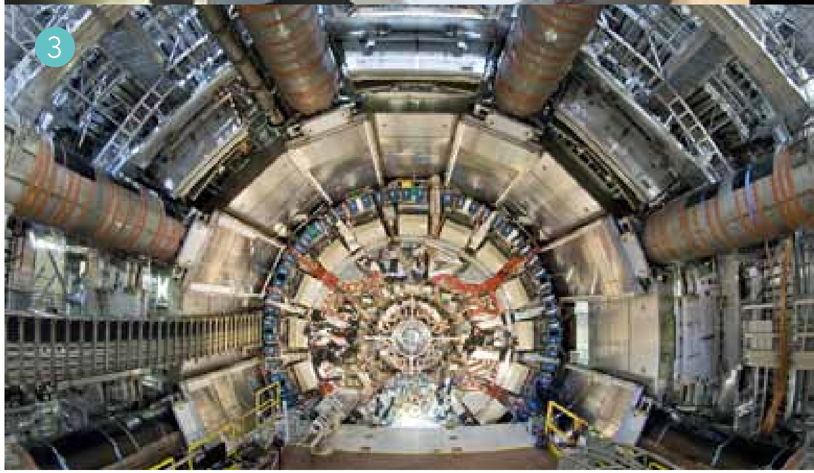
Belgium is involved in a wide range of international scientific programmes, for example in the fields of nuclear research at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN), research into space exploration, and environmental research at its Princess Elisabeth Station in Antarctica, while many other domains, such as nanotechnology, biotechnology and vaccination research, also draw on the expertise of Belgian scientists.

The main source of Belgium's scientific expertise is its universities, which, by creating spin-offs, have succeeded in tapping into this invaluable know-how. For example, the use of proton therapy to treat cancer is probably one of the foremost economic and scientific achievements that has taken place in global science.

Belgian scientists have regularly won the highest accolade in science, a Nobel prize, for the quality of their research, with most recently François Englert being awarded a Nobel Prize in Physics in 2013 for his work on the Higgs boson (or Higgs particle) with the British scientist Peter Higgs.







1. Solar impulse
2. The King and Princess Elisabeth visiting the Inside the Station exhibition in Brussels
3. Extraction system developed for the project that saw the discovery of the Higgs boson, CERN, Geneva

Brussels - an international city

Over 1,000 public and private international organisations have established their headquarters in Brussels, Belgium's capital city. These include the main institutions of the European Union (EU) and of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

The presence of these international organisations means that Brussels has one of the largest communities of foreign diplomats and journalists in the world. The city also attracts many other professionals, among them members of think tanks, academics, experts and lecturers, as well as multinationals and international service companies.

The Belgian capital is also one of the world's major conference venues









At the heart of Europe

The European Union is part of Belgians' everyday life in a number of ways.

A number of European institutions, for instance the European Commission (which has its headquarters in the Berlaymont Building) and the European Council (housed in the Justus Lipsius Building), employing thousands of European civil servants, are based in Brussels – which is therefore often called 'the capital of Europe'.

Brussels regularly hosts European Council meetings and summits, as well as plenary sessions of the European Parliament and meetings of European parliamentary committees.

Belgium has always worked to widen and deepen European integration, and Belgian politicians have played a crucial role in the development of the European Union.

All of this means that Europe is very close to Belgians' hearts.

Belgium was one of the six founding members of what is now the European Union





An attractive country for investment

Belgium is a key international economic player, ranked 13th in the world for both exports and imports by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2012.

Moreover, it is one of the most popular countries for investors, attracting billions of euro of foreign direct investment each year.

A company in Belgium has access to 200 million consumers within a radius of just 500 km, thanks to the country's central geographical location and its high-quality logistical infrastructure, encompassing seaports and inland ports, canals, airports and rail and road (including motorway) networks, with these transport systems being continually adjusted to meet the needs of the economy. To take one example, the Port of Antwerp is the second largest port in Europe and has the biggest petrochemical complex in Europe. Antwerp is the Diamond Capital with 80% of the world's rough diamonds and 50% of the cut diamonds.

There are many other factors, too, behind Belgium's success, for example its highly skilled, multilingual and flexible workforce, the desire to be close to the international decision-makers in Brussels, a host of financial and tax incentives, affordable property prices, Belgians' legendary hospitality and excellent social security.

You can find more information at www.investinbelgium.eu









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